

JUDGING HISTORY

Cook County Presiding Judge Augustine J. Bowe's life revolved around three spheres: the law, civic engagement and poetry.

Bowe (1892-1966) was elected to the bench in 1960 as the Democratic party's "blue ribbon" candidate to lead Municipal Court after a traffic ticket scandal. He held the position until his sudden death at age 73.

Days after Bowe died, columnist Mike Royko wrote the unimaginable, at least for him. Under the headline, "Augustine Bowe: A Judge Who Spoke His Mind," Royko had nice things to say about a local judge. "Even when things got hot - and for the judge in charge of Municipal Court heat waves never end - he didn't hide behind public relations doubletalk or duck a controversy..." asserted Royko, adding that Bowe had done the same as Chicago Bar Association president (1955-56).

Apropos of Royko's appraisal, Judge Bowe, when asked why the law advances at a languid pace, replied, "We so often complain that the functions of courts are being taken over by commissions and bureaus. This is inevitable if the law insists upon keeping a half century behind the rest of human activities."

No wonder retired Chicago lawyer William J. Bowe, a nephew, recently described Judge Bowe as "decent, competent, and with a highly refined common sense." Gene Niezgodka, who served as

Judge Bowe's court administrator and every successor until retiring in 2017, once told me about Bowe's absolute integrity, manifest kindness, and fastidiousness in dress and manners. (Niezgodka introduced me to Bowe's poems. He died in 2018 at age 92.)

Judge Bowe energetically involved himself in professional groups, especially the CBA. He engaged in numerous civic endeavors, many focused on improving relations between Blacks and whites and Catholics and Jews, such as the Chicago Commission on Human Relations (chair, 1948-1960), the Catholic Interracial Council, and the National Conference of Christians and Jews. And he took key roles in local community efforts including the Commission on Chicago's Architectural Landmarks and the Cook County Prisoners Welfare Association.

But poetry was his enduring muse. In 1912, when he was in law school at Loyola, Harriet Monroe established Poetry magazine, which later went on to publish more than 30 of his poems. Among the dozens of famed poets whose works appeared in Poetry were Carl Sandburg, Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, Robert Frost,



HONESTY IN KINDNESS

The poet, presiding judge Augustine Bowe

By MICHAEL B. HYMAN

Edgar Lee Masters and Edna Ct. Vincent Millay.

In 1941, Bowe and his wife, Julia rescued Poetry from potential oblivion by forming a not-for-profit, Modern Poetry Association (known today as the Poetry Foundation). The Association took financial responsibility for the magazine, and Bowe became its President. Through his leadership, the Association weathered occasional editorial and organization controversies that, in any one else's hands would have wrecked the enterprise.

Bowe journaled daily and over decades compiled poems and observations on hundreds of legal pads and typed pages.

An 80-page collection - *No Gods are False* - of Judge Bowe's poems was published by Macmillan Publishers in 1968. In the introduction, John Frederick Nims, a friend and poet, recalled Bowe as - "skeptical, rugged, independent" and "among the most distinguished of the city's million faces." Nims wrote Bowe "needed a voice of his own because what he had to say was his own." And that Bowe had "a deeply serious mind, deeply committed... not only to issues of the day but also, but especially to the mystery of our existence."

Judge Augustine J. Bowe has slipped into history's annals, as have his poems. Both merit our remembering.

There Must Be Honesty in Kindness

There must *be* honesty in kindness.

It must look beyond a bowl of soap, a night of rest

It must not be a momentary blindness, An obstinate refusal to see the sunset in the west.

A fortnight in the country is a good thing for a child

But there are more than a score of fortnights in a year.

And some of them come when the winter is wild.

The youngest infant will grow old and full of /ear.

We must hold many a hand that is dying, We must feed many a face many winters through, And many an angel on white wings flying Has less to do than we have to do.

- Augustine J. Bowe from
"No Gods are False"

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